



**TESTIMONY OF
ELIZABETH PERALTA, LCSW, MHA
SUBMITTED TO THE
APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE
Thursday, February 23, 2017**

HB 7027, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2019, And Making Appropriations Therefor

The Western CT Health Network (WCHN) appreciates this opportunity to submit testimony concerning **HB 7027, An Act Concerning The State Budget For The Biennium Ending June Thirtieth 2019, And Making Appropriations Therefor**. WCHN opposes the proposed budget cuts for mental health and substance use services as we continue to see growing need in western Connecticut. Our hospitals are the safety net for our communities, caring for patients every single day and every single night. We take all comers regardless of ability to pay, or a patient's socioeconomic background. We take these patients when they are at their worst, when they are acting out, under some influence, because we can and should.

The magnitude of cuts outlined in the Governor's budget will erode foundational programs and preventive services driving patients to crisis care-the most expensive point of care and not the kind of care our communities need and deserve.

Across our network of three hospitals, we see only growing needs. This is no time to cut services for mental health and addiction services. It is no secret that heroin and prescription drug abuse remain a significant problem in our communities. We see an increase in opioid use, abuse and related deaths across the state first-hand in our emergency departments every day.

The most recent Behavioral Health Barometer for Connecticut (SAMHSA, 2015) reports an increase in:

- Adolescents aged 12-17 (now at 32.2%) who perceive no great risk from smoking one or more packs of cigarettes daily
- Adolescents aged 12-17 (now at 32.2%) who perceive no great risk from smoking marijuana once per month
- Past year non-medical use of pain relievers among adolescents aged 12-17
- Past year illicit drug dependence or abuse among those aged 12 or older
- Past year major depressive episode among adolescents aged 12-17

The report also states that Connecticut has a higher percentage than the US for:

- Past month illicit drug use by adolescents aged 12-17
- Past month binge alcohol use among individuals aged 12-20

The proposed reduction in grants for mental health and substance use services by \$4.7 million each fiscal year will put additional financial pressure on community providers, including hospitals. Our EDs are already filled on any given day with patients who are in crisis, living through and, unfortunately, often dying as a result of substance abuse.

Those communities that continue to embrace the Community Care Team (CCT) model of integrated care are doing amazing and effective work to reduce avoidable ED visits and stabilize high-utilizing patients, even housing many of these patients. But the needs are growing, and these programs remains unfunded by the state.

We ask that the Appropriations Committee renew the commitment it made on two occasions during the last biennium to fund the CCT program to enable more communities to implement these care coordination programs. Further, we ask that the Committee re-institute funding to DMHAS to cover other important community-based and hospital mental health programming.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony. For additional information, contact Andrea Rynn at WCHN Government Relations at (203) 739-7919.

Ref: SAMHSA Behavioral health barometer, 2015 https://www.samhsa.gov/data/sites/default/files/2015_National_Barometer.pdf